

**Vision 21 Implementation Committee**  
**Minutes – August 29, 2002**  
**Adopted as written September 5, 2002**

**Members present:** Martin Greco, Joe Greene, Matt Hausman, Tim Higgins, Sara Oaklander, Meg O'Brien, Jennifer Page, Paul Solomon, Barry Winston  
**Members absent:** Bill Hofmann, Ralph Jones  
**Also present:** Cavas Ghobai, Dolores Keefe  
**Observer:** Bill Engstrom

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:03 by Chairperson Jennifer Page.
2. **Review of minutes.** Jennifer pointed out that the minutes of the August 22, 2002 meeting incorrectly reference which minutes were reviewed and approved at that meeting. The dates should read August 1 and August 8 (rather than August 8 and August 15). The minutes were then approved as amended.
3. **Proposal on planning.** Paul expressed his regret at not having anything to report. He and Mel Kleckner have not yet drafted the mandates. Doing so remains a priority; it will get done soon.

**4. Forums.**

- 4.1 Flyers.** Jennifer thanked Matt for his assistance with photocopying the flyers. She asked for feedback regarding distribution. Members reported on various reactions they'd been getting from business owners, ranging from positive, enthusiastic and pleasantly surprised to a more cynical "nothing will happen" attitude. Not all flyers have been distributed yet. Joe has made an effort to get flyers to commercial property owners in his area.

We discussed whether or not it makes sense to post flyers in store/business windows. Jennifer suggested that if we have not yet distributed flyers, we should post a few in key places.

- 4.2 Forum plans.** Jennifer reported that she and Cavas had met to discuss the agenda for the forums. They had struggled to keep the forums to two hours. She distributed a handout on the proposed plan for review and discussion. (see attached handout.) Specific points of discussion included:

Desired Outcomes It is important that we succeed in engaging at least some of the participants in next steps. The more participation we achieve, the better. We also want people to feel engaged in and stimulated by the discussion that takes place.

Cavas suggested we amend the language describing the forum objectives so that it is the same as the language used in the flyer. Matt emphasized the importance of including language about what works in terms of doing business in Belmont. It was agreed that a consistent message is important. Jennifer and Cavas will revise the language on the basis of these comments.

Flow for the Forum/Agenda: Generating "long" and "short" lists Discussion ensued regarding the use of an existing list of issues as a starting point to generate a longer list. Some members cautioned that we might devalue issues/concerns that don't make it to the short list. Emphasis was placed on the importance of reviewing the process at the start of the forums. Alternative language to "short" list was suggested, including "beginning list" and "where do we start;" and for the "long" list, "master list."

Role of VIC members as facilitators. Jennifer clarified and emphasized that it will be our job to facilitate and record in the small groups, and not our place to generate ideas. We need to leave that up to the participants. Consistent language for us to use was discussed, particularly with regard to how we might respond to identified problems. Cavas suggested we use language such as "What do you wish would have happened instead?"

Joe expressed concern regarding members' abilities to answer questions accurately. Cavas' response was that we focus on capturing issues, questions, and ideas, rather than providing answers. If someone gets hung up on a particular question, we might want to make an assumption on which to base the response and then move on. Matt suggested we use a "parking lot" approach to capture questions we can't answer.

Asked for an explanation of the word "convergence" in this context, Cavas explained that themes may emerge from the discussion. He also explained that the recommendations generated may include both content recommendations and process recommendations.

Further discussion ensued regarding the approach we will use in facilitating discussions in the small groups, and the importance of ensuring a consistent approach that starts with defining and clarifying issues, generating and capturing side issues, and brainstorming ideas. A suggestion was made to provide a clear framework for facilitation, and to develop some questions we can pick and choose from to move the conversations along. These might include: "How are things now?" "How do we want them to be?" "What do you wish would happen?" "How do you wish this issue would be addressed?" "What steps could be taken?" Paul suggested we underscore to the participants the fact that improving the economic environment in the town is one of the first mandates from the Selectmen to the VIC.

Jennifer, Matt, and Cavas will do further work on a specific framework and questions for facilitators.

#### **4.3 Further outreach**

Commercial property owners. Delores reported that she was able to obtain from the assessor's office a list of landlords by address. We will use this list to distribute flyers to commercial property owners. It was agreed that including them is a priority, but we shouldn't expect to reach and/or engage them all. Jennifer will get back to VIC members regarding distribution by territories.

Publicity. Clint Knight of the Watertown/Belmont Chamber of Commerce wrote a piece about the forums in today's paper. Tim drafted a piece for Jennifer to edit and submit for next week's paper. We agreed that using Channel 8 is not a priority for outreach to the business community.

The pros and cons were discussed of having a reporter cover the forums. It was agreed that since the forums are a public meeting, it is up to the newspaper to decide whether or not to cover the events and we will not intervene in that decision.

#### **4.4 Other details:**

Inclusion of town officials. Discussion ensued regarding whether or not to invite members of various committees and other town officials. It was agreed that we should invite the following as observers, not as participants: Planning Board, ZBA, Community Development, Long Range Financial Planning Committee, and Board of Selectmen. Tim offered to distribute the flyer electronically with a message extending the invitation to be the members of these committees to attend as observers.

Roles. Help will be needed with set-up, food, nametags, greeting, facilitating, and clean-up. VIC members need to be prepared to usher participants to their seats so that we will be able to start on time and keep to our ambitious agenda.

Sign-in sheets. We need a record of participants to thank them and send any relevant follow-up.

Attribution of comments. Discussion ensued regarding how to handle the fact that we will be gathering comments from participants without identifying who said what. Should we be clear with participants that this is the case or would raising the issue make too big of a deal out of it? It was decided that we will not raise the issue explicitly.

Business owners and commercial property owners. Those involved in landlord/tenant relationships might find it difficult to be candid if seated together during the small group discussions. We will be open about

this fact and ask people to separate themselves accordingly.

Food. Various options were floated for obtaining food – purchasing it at full price, requesting to purchase it at cost, and requesting donations of food. Delores will find out some information from another group that has provided refreshments, Jennifer will follow-up with Joe regarding an approach to Shaw's and others, and Paul will ask Mel Kleckner if there is any money available to cover refreshments.

**5. Meeting schedule:** After the forums, we will go back to meeting on a biweekly basis.

**6. Other business**

**6.1 Newcomer booklets.** Joe reported that he has more newcomer booklets available for distribution if anyone would like to have some additional copies. Jennifer reminded him that we need to make sure we save some for any realtors who might need more for new homeowners and/or tenants.

**6.2 Newcomers' initiative.** Jennifer reported that efforts to recruit people through the newspaper and cable TV to work in organizing a plan for making Belmont more welcoming to newcomers have not resulted in new volunteers. In order to pursue this priority, we need three or four long-term Belmont residents to work on this project. Jennifer asked that each VIC member think of someone we know who could be engaged in this project over the course of a few months.

**7. Meeting feedback:** Jennifer invited Committee members to share any feedback regarding the meeting. Comments included appreciation for careful time-keeping, the idea that working in subgroups might become necessary as a result of an extensive workload, and a concern that Jennifer herself might be taking on too much of the workload related to the forums.

**8. Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned promptly at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sara Oaklander  
Secretary pro tem